



Progress Report

“Where is God at work doing new things?” This is a question I want to explore with you as we seek to follow God’s leading for us as the people of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

We’re on a journey together that requires courageous imagination to open us to seeing where the Spirit is at work among us and in the world. In the midst of the pandemic, in the midst of social upheaval, in the midst of people and creation in crisis, God is busy doing new things, and making a way forward. Together, we will dream, imagine, and listen to each other’s stories of faith as we seek to hear God’s voice. We are guided by scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit as we discern together where God is calling us in the years ahead. The journey itself is as important as where we end up. It is a shared experience that will transform us along the way.

I look forward to walking this journey of courageous imagination with you!” - Leah Reesor-Keller

Why are we on this journey?

Our hope is to facilitate a shared journey where all voices are welcomed to share different visions of the church. We seek to create connection with each other and between congregations. As a result of this journey, together we will imagine and distill our shared values and mission of MCEC for the future. We will build a shared story together about who we are and who God is calling us to become.

The current Statement of Identity and Purpose, Vision and Mission of MCEC were written in 2005.

MCEC’s last strategic plan was developed in 2014.

What is this journey about?

This will be a journey together, following Jesus and learning from each other along the way. The outcome is the mission, values and strategic priorities that will shape all of us in the years to come. The questions that will guide our journey are as follows:

1. How do we listen for God?
2. Where is God at work doing new things?"
3. Who are we together? What is the church that we are becoming?
4. How is God calling us as the church together?
5. How do you feel God is calling the church to respond and adapt to the changing local and global context?
6. **Who will be leading this journey?**
7. **Executive Council:** Setting the scope, guiding the questions, listening and observing events, testing emerging themes ongoing, give approval at each stage to move on to the next steps, giving final approval to the outcomes of the process.
8. The **Executive Team** is responsible to ensure that the process is inclusive and offers/ facilitates connection opportunities with all groups identified on the constituency engagement list. Executive Team members will provide reflection and interpretation of the findings as they unfold, and work with their teams on developing the goals coming out of the strategic priorities.
9. **Leah: Guide** – Leah will guide the full process, sharing her voice, energy, questions and insights along the way. She will frame the conversations, ensure that we are on the right path, and that all voices are reflected.
10. **Mollee: Project Manager & Producer** – Mollee will lead the series of engagements with community, leading and implementing video interviews, podcasts, or other events, inviting in new voices and encouraging participation and connection at events and on MCEC's web and social media channels. This includes recruiting and supervising volunteers and subcontractors like interpreters and videographers who may be involved in the process.

How will we journey together?

Our guiding values call this process to be intercultural and diverse, to build connection across the church body, to be grounded in spirituality, and to work from the bottom up. Because it is critical that this journey is responsive and closely connected to all voices across the church, we will be flexible and may change pieces of this process along the way to ensure it is reflecting our guiding values above.

The journey will consist of a series of conversation events that will appeal to different groups across MCEC's diverse constituency. All events are centred around facilitating conversation about the guiding questions of the journey. EC and ET members will do strategic listening at events to ensure that key themes are emerging to feed into the discernment and visioning process.

MCEC's website and social media accounts will share content emerging along the journey, and provide a way for all interested constituents to keep track of the journey and join in as they choose, whether that is attending an event, watching a video or listening to a podcast and leaving comments. A digital engagement presence also makes it possible to engage more easily across different languages, using tools like Facebook's auto-translate features, and sharing videos with captioning in different languages.

Step 1: Review existing materials including outcomes from the 2005 & 2014 strategic planning process, and notes from focus groups from the 2020 executive minister search process. Pull out key themes that emerged from the review process. *This occurred from Sep-Nov 2020.*

Summary: *Seeking unity not uniformity. Community & peace is core of who we are.*

Intercultural/diversity is part of our identity, living our faith out every day in all aspects of life. Our culture is authentic, relational, informal, egalitarian, interdependent, valuing mutuality, interdependent in community together. We want to know each other and be connected to each other (lamenting current perceived disconnect). MCEC congregations can provide hope, meaning, belonging in an uncertain world. There is opportunity to be bridge-builders across cultures, theology, and other forms of diversity in congregations, MCEC, community, world. Mennonite faith has a unique perspective of peace witness, faith-in-action to bring to the wider Christian family and to the world.

Step 2: Consult with Executive Council and Executive Team on early hopes and aspirations for MCEC's future direction. With Executive Council, determine scope of the planning and visioning process. Involve Executive Council and MCEC staff team in developing and refining the guiding questions for community spiritual discernment phase. *In-process from Nov 2020-Jan 2021 (scope, guiding values & hopes, constituent list)*

Summary of MCEC Executive Council and Executive Team hopes for the MCEC of the future:

Intercultural, Diverse, Connected, Spiritual, Community-driven

These hopes for the future of MCEC are the guiding values of the community spiritual discernment process (step 3).

Step 3: Community spiritual discernment process, Feb 2021-August 2021.

Feb 14 - Prayer Gathering (Zoom), **55** participants.

Feb-August – Facebook and Instagram posts featuring MCEC constituents answering CI guiding questions

April 23-24 – Annual Church Gathering online, **200** attendees, **82** congregations, **67** survey responses on CI guiding questions.

April-June – Courageous Imagination 10-episode podcast series, interviewing **16** people from different age groups, theological perspectives, cultural backgrounds and geographic locations across MCEC. **1,300~** listens.

April-June – 9 CI podcast discussion forums, **59** participants attended one or more forums.

May - Courageous Imagination discussion at Youth Worker Retreat and Youth Retreat

May- Launch of Courageous Imagination song, written by Moses Mugisha (linked to podcast episode and forum).

June - One page spread in *Canadian Mennonite* encouraging engagement with the process and sharing back emerging themes

June – MCEC in Ministry newsletter highlighting the process, sharing back themes coming out of the Annual Church Gathering, and encouraging engagement, mailed to **1380** households.

June – All Councils meeting (EC, Mission Council, Leadership Council, Finance Council)

July-Aug –MCEC Ecosystem Mapping research project, including interviews with MCEC congregations and partner ministries.

September and beyond – Podcast facilitation guide in production, encouraging congregations to use the CI podcast series as small group or Sunday school material.

Step 4: Develop and test strategic direction and revised identity, building on the community spiritual discernment and reciprocal listening process. *Presenting summary of key themes coming out of the guiding questions, asking for specific feedback on MCEC regional church priorities.*

- Sep 24 - Schools & camps gathering Sep 24
- Sep 29 - MCEC staff retreat Sep 29
- Oct-early Nov - In-person regional gatherings across Ontario and Quebec,
- 1:1 conversations with key individuals, especially in first generation congregations
- Nov 16: Review feedback at Nov 16 EC meeting, make adjustments
- Jan 18 – Revised statements for discussion and approval at EC meeting
- Jan-Feb, review proposed statements at ministerial gatherings
- Feb 26, 2022 – EC and Executive Team Retreat Day, final adjustments
- March 1st – Final version for Annual Church Gathering ready for printing in ACG materials

Step 5: Launch the new and updated identity and strategic plan. *This will be launched at the Spring 2022 Annual Gathering, April 29-30 2022.*

Step 6: Develop goals and program plans, review and adjust organizational structure to align with strategic plan, communicate changes *May 2022-Dec 2022.*

Summary of Key Themes:

Who are we together? What is the church that we are becoming?

- A diverse, intercultural family of congregations and ministries, putting our Mennonite-Anabaptist faith in action as we follow Jesus together.
- People of faith, seeking to be transformed by the Spirit
- Becoming increasingly diverse, inclusive and welcoming

How is God calling us as the church together?

- Be open to transformation, to learning and growing in faith, by the power of the Spirit, through relationships with people inside and outside the church.
- Engaging the world together, building on Mennonite - Anabaptist values of peace, justice, community discernment, costly discipleship

How do you feel God is calling the church to respond and adapt to the changing local and global context?

- Engage and lead on responding to issues and challenging topics of our day, including anti-racism, climate crisis, poverty
- Be willing to try new things, take a risk, explore new ways of living out faith and being the church together
- Stay centred and grounded following Jesus and going back to scripture.
- Build an identity that welcomes everyone to God's table
- Hold local and global together

What longings or hopes do you hear?

- a desire for deep listening and learning from each other in intergenerational and intercultural relationships within the church and outside the church
- a place for youth and young adults to belong and grow spiritually
- longing for connection between congregations, desire to feel part of a bigger family of faith
- longing for more people to come into relationship with Jesus

What fears or worries do you hear?

- Fear of how the pandemic will change congregations long term, accelerating trends related to aging congregants, declining role of church in broader Canadian society
- Concern that youth & young adults are disconnecting from congregations by moving away or losing faith

Early draft of identity statements, based on key themes:

Vision & Mission

We are a diverse family of congregations, church plants and ministries seeking to follow Jesus in life and put our faith into action.

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Values

Hospitality & welcome for all

Equality & dignity of all people

Living in community

Peace and justice

Mutuality

Generosity

Listening, learning, openness to transformation

Priorities

- Foster a culture of learning, innovation and adaptability to equip the Church to navigate a season of change
- Support and resource congregations to engage conflict, peace and justice issues, grounded in Mennonite-Anabaptist theology
- Develop intercultural competency across the Regional Church body
- Invest in leadership development and faith formation for pastors, church planters and lay leaders, including call to ministry and ongoing resourcing
- Work collaboratively with congregations and ministry partners to support youth faith formation and leadership development, and to engage youth and young adults in leadership development opportunities at different levels.

Questions for reflection:

What do you affirm here? What is surprising or challenging? What is missing? What perspectives or voices should be further engaged in the process?